

Mary Helen McMurrin
Winter 2017
English 9150B

Wed. 12:30-3:30
Lawson Hall 2210

Out of Their Heads: The Senses, the Soul, and Poetic Consciousness

By the Romantic era, the subject of poetry is the poet's own soul-- its own exquisite sensations, its visions, its "emotions recollected in tranquility," as Wordsworth put it. Yet, the modern idea of a self-conscious, sensate, and thinking being began much earlier, as did its poetic expressions. In this course we will trace the development poetic self-consciousness from the middle of the seventeenth century to the early Romantics. Instead of the familiar literary and cultural history of the self and its agency, or the self and sensibility, we will track consciousness as, on the one hand, an imaginative retreat from the world into the mind, and, alternately, as co-extensive with sensory experience. Not coincidentally, nature poetry and its thematization of heightened sensory attention are crucial to this history. We will study a range of poets from Anne Finch, to Alexander Pope, James Thomson, and William Cowper, with an emphasis on overlooked lyric forms: ode, hymn, and reverie. The course will end with Wordsworth, Coleridge and Keats. The poetry will be studied along side brief selections from philosophical debates about the relation of body, mind, and soul; many of the texts are paired with a scholarly essay or book chapter.

Pedagogy

This course is a seminar: I may give a few short lectures, but for the most part students engage with me and each other in an intellectual conversation on the material. We will also incorporate basic mindfulness techniques for about 10-15 minutes each week. I will discuss the aims and benefits of mindfulness practice at our first session.

Texts

All readings will be scanned and copied for students.

Work

All written work shall be submitted in electronic format only (Word or RTF). I may use plagiarism-checking software.

- 1.) Oral presentation of a reading and 5-6 page write-up. 20% of final grade. The primary aim is for you to present an analysis of some aspect of the text rather than summarize the whole or try to cover multiple ideas in the text. Focus on analysis and attempt to explain a thesis about the reading. The secondary aim is for you to spur class discussion. You will be evaluated on content and on clarity of presentation. Plan to speak in class for no more than 20 minutes.
- 2.) Weekly oral participation. Come to class having read the material thoroughly and prepared to contribute your thoughts and observations. For the first few weeks, I may send you study questions and a prompt to consider certain passages in order to help you prepare for discussion.
- 3.) Designated respondent for another student's presentation (once only). This response and your weekly participation will make up 15% of the final grade. As the designated respondent you may do any number of things: ask for clarification based on your own understanding of the reading; present a similar or alternative reading of the text; draw us to another aspect of the reading that develops the presenter's reading; formulate a question for discussion. You will not have a copy of the student's presentation prior to your response.

4.) Summary and analysis of one of the secondary sources on the syllabus assigned between Jan 18 and March 15. Due no later than March 22. You may use the secondary source assigned in conjunction with your oral presentation. 5-7 pages. 10% of final grade. A goal of this course is to improve your ability to write theoretically informed and contextualized essays on literary texts. This exercise aims to prepare you for tackling larger independent projects, which require you to intervene in a critical tradition as a result of research and reviews of the literature. Format and strategies for the analysis will be discussed in class.

5.) Essay: approx 15 pages. 55% of the final grade.

Any topic and approach relevant to the course is acceptable. Style and documentation: MLA Bibliography style or *Chicago Manual of Style*, 15th edition. Late papers will be penalized except in extenuating circumstances.

Policies

No laptops or other devices in class.

Absences are unacceptable except in extenuating circumstances.

Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following Web site: http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/handbook/appeals/scholastic_discipline_grad.pdf

Schedule

Jan. 11 Introduction

Jan. 18 Terms: Person, Identity, Self, Consciousness, Imagination

Stephen Gaukroger, "Home Alone: Cognitive Solipsism in the Early Modern Era" *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* 80:2 (2006): 63-78.

Richard Aquila, "The Cartesian and a Certain "Poetic" Notion of Consciousness," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 49: 4 (1988): 543-62.

Jan 25 Locke's Self as Consciousness

John Locke from *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, "Of Identity and Diversity," pp 443-452

Raymond Martin and John Barresi, "Personal Identity," *Naturalization of the Soul* (Routledge, 2000)

Group email by Jan 24th at 5 p.m. a short excerpt that represents consciousness (poetry or narrative or non-fiction; any time period or tradition)

Feb 1 Inwardness

David Fairer, "The Romantic Mode," *English Poetry of the Eighteenth Century* (Pearson, 2003)

Alexander Pope, "Eloisa to Abelard," Anne Finch "A Nocturnal Reverie" and "Spleen: An Ode"

Feb 8 The Senses and the Poetics of Nature

James Thomson, *The Seasons* "Winter"

Patricia Meyer Spacks, "Introduction," *The Poetry of Vision* (Harvard UP, 1967)

Feb. 15 The Senses and the Poetics of Nature II

James Thomson, *The Seasons* "Summer," "Autumn" [excerpt]

Heather Keenleyside, "Personification for the People: On Thomson's *Seasons*" *ELH* 76. 2 (2009)

READING WEEK

Mar. 1 Turn of the Century Self

William Cowper, "The Task" [excerpts]; Charlotte Smith from *Elegiac Sonnets*

Fernando Vidal, "Psychology, the Body, Personal Identity," *The Sciences of the Soul* (U of Chicago, 2011)

Mar. 8 Romantic Consciousness I

William Wordsworth, "Ode: Intimations on Immortality"; Samuel Taylor Coleridge, "Kubla Khan," "The Pains of Sleep"

Alan Richardson, "Coleridge and the New Unconscious," *British Romanticism and the Science of the Mind* (Cambridge UP, 2001)

Mar. 15 Romantic Consciousness II

John Keats, "Sonnet to Sleep," "Ode on Melancholy," "Ode on Indolence," "To Autumn"

Alan Richardson, "Keats and the Glories of the Brain," *British Romanticism and the Science of the Mind* (Cambridge UP, 2001)

Mar. 22

No class: meetings regarding final essays

Mar. 29 Cognitive Humanities

Blakey Vermeule, "The Cognitive Dimension," *Why Do We Care About Literary Characters?* (Stanford, 2010)

N. Katherine Hayles, "The Cognitive Nonconscious: Enlarging the Mind of the Humanities" *Critical Inquiry* 42 (2016): 783-808

Apr 5

Conclusions and brief oral presentations of final essays

Essays due April 18